St. Thomas, W. I. 30th April 1880

My dear Dr. Gray!

I received with much pleasure your letter of 5th inst. and am much obliged to you for entering so warmly on my proposal for the botanical exploration of the W. I. islands. There is certainly much to be done here still, much more, than you or anybody else might perhaps think, even here in St. Thomas, which I had expected to have done thoroughly, I have in these days found a new plant, which is of great interest in many respects. It is a Menispermacea, but not climbing like Cocculus or Cissampelos, but an erect-growing low tree. It is no doubt the species, imperfectly described and mentioned as a doubtful Cissampelos laurifolia in DC. Prod. I, 102, and which I had entirely overlooked, although he gives St. Thomas as habitat. I have only found the male tree as yet, DC. mentions the fruit. I intend describing the species, which is no doubt a separate genus. It is at all events much more closely related to Cocculus, having like this genus 6 stamens, and 6 biserial sepals, but only 3 petals. The male inflorescence is also very much alike that of Cocc. domingensis, which is found here in the Island. I am only looking out for the female and fruit in order to have sufficient material for describing the species. The structure of the stem is also most interesting.

With regard to my scheme for the exploration of our archipelago, I have made on my own account great progress already. Dr. Garber in his letter from Portorico (which bye-the-bye is the only one I have got from him) amongst other things told me, that Americans value time, and as this might be a good thing to do for others also, I commenced working immediately after my return from Dominica in the

considerable expense for travelling in the tropics as well as for workmen, freight etc etc I should think this a reasonable price, at which on the other hand, if a sufficient number of sets could be disposed of, the undertaking might be made to bear its own expenses and to support itself. In order to secure this latter end, I have also directed Mr. Calderon to collect Orchids and similar plants also to dispose of to florists in England, who readily pay a good price for the more showy kinds.

From Germany I received an offer for a number of sets of dried plants from St. Thomas from a Mr. Toepffer, who is the manager of a german society for exchanging plants, and although he offered a lower price than the one named above, I think I can accept his offer, as it concerns only plants from this place, which I can have collected and pressed at a lower expense by natives, than if I had to send collectors to other islands.

If sufficient inducement offers itself the collections may be made to embrace also landshells, insects and minerals, for which branches experts no doubt may be found, that will determine them. Mr. Thos. Bland, from whom I had an interesting letter the other day, will no doubt readily undertake the first named ones.

If thus you could get establishments or individuals to subscribe for sets of plants, seeds and woods, I could have the first parts forwarded at once, especially of the seeds and woods, and thus at once start on a larger scale including other islands. Of course nobody is expected to pay till after having received his sets or parts of them.

It would indeed be a pleasant thing if you could make a trip to the Westindies, my dear Doctor, I am sure you would enjoy it very much, and as the voyage is so short, only 5 days from New York,

beginning of March, and have in these two months done an immense amount of work. I have begun with forming afresh herbaria of plants from St. Thomas as well as from those brought from Dominica, in order to form a basis for the W. I. Herbaria, which I think may be offered to scientific institutions and individuals, in order to cover expenses for collecting and further investigations.

Besides Herbaria I have formed an extensive collection of 1/ Fruits and seeds, and 2/ Wood of all arborescent and shrubby plants, by which to supplement the Herbaria. The latter collection especially, consisting already of more than 100 carefully determined species of timber trees and lesser shrubs, in stems from 2" to 40" in circumference, and containing many very interesting specimens, will no doubt also prove of interest to technical museums and industrial schools. Among these stems are of interest not only the fine hard-woods, but also f. i. the curious arborescent vines, such as Bignoniaceae, the structure of which family as you know has lately been investigated by Bureau, Serjania lucida, Acacia sarmentosa and many others.

The collection of fruits and seeds must prove of no less interest both to botanists as also horticulturists, florists and museums, it consists already of more than 200 different species.

These various collections I have formed in order to distribute them to institutions and individuals, who I see you also think may be found willing to receive them at a reasonable price, by which the expenses might be covered and means found for further investigations.

I have, to begin with, sent off a young botanist to Trinidad the other day, by english steamer at my own expense, his name is Chas. U. Calderon, a young native of this place, an enthusiastic lover of botany, who no doubt will do well enough, although he has got no scientific training so far.

This however does not preclude at all that you may find another botanist to come out here too, as you kindly promise to do, as there are fields for work sufficient for several or even many. The next great field of operation in my opinion, leaving Portorico for the time to Dr. Garber, ought to be Sto Domingo and Hayti, a country which easily may consume a couple of mens lifetime in exploring thoroughly.

I now would ask your kind cooperation to this important work, which I trust will succeed well and give great satisfaction to all, partly, if possible, to find a young botanist, whom we could engage to send out to some other island, and with whom I could correspond about the particulars, partly by securing participation from institutions and private individuals in the U. States by subscribing for sets of plants, fruits & seeds, and woods, either for all or parts of these collections. In Europe my friend Dr. Warming will take the necessary steps in that direction, and in this way I hope in a short time to be able to direct operations on a larger scale than hitherto and to get hold of some of the more interesting islands.

I am entirely at a loss to know what you may set down as the price for such collections, I proposed to Dr. Warming about $12.– a hundred dried plants, $20.– for a collection of 100 woods and $8.– for a collection of 100 fruits and seeds. Considering the

I have not given up all hopes of seeing you this fall.

From Dr. Garber I have neither heard anything. Your papers on Garberia I have sent down in a letter directed to the U. S. Consul in Ponce, to whom Dr. G. requested me to send anything I received for him, which I did with the copy of Grisebachs Flora, that came to him from Kew I think. I hope to hear from the Consul how Dr. G. is and what is the matter with him. I should certainly feel very sorry, if anything had happened to him, he seemed to be a very amiable man. If I had time, I should not hesitate to start down on a short trip to look him up as Mr. Stanley did with Livingstone.

Perhaps he has thought I was still in Dominica; that does however not account for his not having written to you.

My collections from Dominica prove of the highest interest. That island alone will take a year at least to explore thoroughly. I found amongst other things several interesting Lobeliaceae, which do not occur in Grisebach.

With all this on hand, I am not far from exclaiming like yourself about the insufficiency of time, we ought to invent some means of utilizing the time, that is wasted away by so many others in doing nothing.

Hoping soon to hear from you, I remain, dear Sir, with best regards for self and Mrs. Gray

Very truly yours

Eggers

P. S. The specimens of wood are 4" long each and taken from full-grown stems. Freight to be paid by the consignee.